NUMB. CCCIII.

The SPECTATOR.

——— volet hæc sub luce videri,
Judicis argutum quæ non formidat acumen. Hor.

Saturday, February 16. 1712

Have seen in the Works of a Modern Philosopher, a Map of the Spots in the Sun. My last Paper of the Faults and Blemishes in *Milton's Paradise Lost*, may be consider'd as a Piece of the same Nature. To pursue the Allusion: As it is said, that among the bright parts of the Luminous Body above-mentioned, there are some which shine more intensely, and dart a stronger Light than others, notwithstanding I have already shewn that Poem to be very beautiful in general, I shall now proceed to take notice of such Beauties as appear to me more exquisite than the rest. *Milton* has proposed the Subject of his Poem in the following Verses.

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heavenly Muse ———

These Lines are perhaps as plain, simple and unadorned as any of the whole Poem, in which particular Author has conform'd himself to the Example of Horace, and the Precept of *Horace*.

The Invocation to a Work which turns in a great measure upon the Creation of the World, is very properly made to the Muse who inspired *Moses* in those Books from whence our Author drew his Subject, and to the Holy Spirit who is therein represented as operating after a particular manner in the first Production of Nature. This whole Exordium rises very naturally into noble Language and Sentiment; as the Transition to the Fable is exquisitely beautiful and natural.

The nine Days Astonishment, in which the Angels lay entranced after their dreadful Overthrow and Fall from Heaven, before they could recover either the use of Thought or Speech, is a noble *Circumstance*, and very finely imagined. The Division of Hell into Seas of Fire, and into firm Ground impregnated with the same furious Element, with the particular Circumstance of the exclusion of *Hope* from those Infernal Regions, are Instances of the same great and fruitful Invention.

The Thoughts in the first Speech and Description of Satan, who is one of the principal Actors in this Work, are wonderfully proper to give us a full Idea of him. His Pride, Envy and Revenge, Obstinacy, Despair and Impenitence, are all of them very artfully interwoven. In short, his first Speech is a Compliation of all those Passions which discover themselves separately in several other of his Speeches in the Poem. The whole part of this great Enemy of Mankind, is filled with such Incidents as are very apt to raise and terrify the Reader's Imagination. Of this Nature, in the Passage now before us, is his being the first that appears out of the general Trance, with his Posture on the burning Lake, his rising from it, and the Description of his Shield and Spear.

Satan talking to his nearest mate,
With head up-lift above the wave, and eyes
That sparkling blazed; his other parts beside
Prone on the Flood, extended long and large,
Lay floating many a rood ——
Such upright he bears his head from off the pool
His mighty Stature; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
In billows, leave i'th' midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air
That felt unusual weight ——
—— His ponderous Shield
Ethereal temper, massie, large and round
Behind him cast; the broad circumference
Hung on his Shoulders like the Moon, whose orb
Thro' Optick Glass the Tuscan Artist views
At Evening from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno to descry new Lands,
Rivers or Mountains on her spotty Globe.
His Spear to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian Hills to be the Mast
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand
He walked with to support unequal Steps
Over the burning Marl ——

To which we may add his Call to the fallen Angels that lay plunged and stupified in the Sea of Fire.

He call'd so loud, that all the hollow deep
Of Hell resounded ——

But there is no single Passage in the whole Poem worked up to a greater Sublimity, than that wherein his Person is described in those celebrated Lines:

——He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a Tower, &c.

His Sentiments are every way answerable to his Character, and are suitable to a created Being of the most exalted and most depraved Nature. Such is that in which he takes Possession of his Place of Torments.

——Hail Horrors, hail
Infernal World, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor, one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.

And afterwards,

——Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, tho' in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.

Amidst those Impieties which this Enraged Spirit utters in other places of the Poem, the Author has taken care to introduce none that is not big with absurdity, and incapable of shocking a Religious Reader; his Words, as the Poet himself describes them, bearing only a *semblance of Worth, not Substance*. He is likewise with great Art described as owning his Adversary to be Almighty. Whatever perverse Interpretation he puts on the Justice, Mercy, and other Attributes of the Supreme Being, he frequently confesses his Omnipotence, that being the Perfection he was forced to allow him, and the only Consideration which could support his Pride under the Shame of his Defeat.

Nor must I here omit that beautiful Circumstance of his bursting out in Tears, upon his Survey of those innumerable Spirits whom he had involved in the same Guilt and Ruin with himself.

——He now prepared
To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
With all his Peers: Attention held them mute.
Thrice he assay'd, and thrice in spite of Scorn
Tears such as Angels weep, burst forth ——

The Catalogue of Evil Spirits has a great deal of Learning in it, and a very agreeable turn of Poetry, which rises in a great measure from his describing the

the Places where they were worshipped, by those beautiful marks of Rivers so frequent among the Ancient Poets. The Author had doubtless in this place *Homer*'s Catalogue of Ships, and *Virgil*'s List of Warriors in his view. The Characters of *Moloch* and *Belial* prepare the Reader's Mind for their respective Speeches and Behaviour in the second and sixth Book. The account of *Thammuz* is finely Romantick, and suitable to what we read among the Ancients of the Worship which was paid to that Idol.

The Passage in the Catalogue, explaining the manner how Spirits transform themselves by Contraction, or Enlargement of their Dimensions, is introduced with great Judgement, to make way for several surprizing Accidents in the Sequel of the Poem. There follows one, at the very End of the First Book, which is what the *French* Critics call *Marvellous*, but at the same time *probable* by reason of the Passage last mentioned. As soon as the Infernal Palace is finished, we are told the Multitude and Rubble of Spirits immediately shrunk themselves into a small Compass, that there might be Room for such a numberless Assembly in this capacious Hall. But it is the Poet's Refinement upon this Thought, which I most admire, and which is indeed very noble in its self. For he tells us, that notwithstanding the vulgar, among the fallen Spirits, contracted their Forms, those of the first Rank and Dignity still preserved their natural Dimensions.

Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest Forms
Reduc'd their Shapes immense, and were at large,
Though without Number still amidst the Hall
Of that infernal Court. But for within,
And in their own Dimensions like themselves,
The Great Seraphick Lords and Cherubim,
In close recess and Secret conclave sate,
A thousand Demy Gods on Golden Seats,
Frequent and full ——

The Character of *Adamman*, and the Description of the *Pandæmonium*, are full of Beauties.

There are several other Strokes in the First Book wonderfully poetical, and Instances of that Sublime Genius so peculiar to the Author. Such is the Description of *Azazel*'s Stature, and of the Infernal Standard, which he unfurls, and of that ghastly Light, by which the Fiends appear to one another in their Place of Torments.

The Seat of Desolation, void of Light,
Save what the glimmering of those livid Flames
Casts pale and dreadful ——

The Shout of the whole Host of fallen Angels when drawn up in Battel Array:

——*The Universal Host up sent*
A Shout that tore Hells Concave, and beyond
Frighted the reign of Chaos *and old Night.*

The Review, which the Leader makes of his Infernal Army:

——*He thro' the armed files*
Darts his experienc'd eye, and soon traverse
The whole Battalion views, their order due,
Their Visages and Stature as of Gods,
Their number last he sums. And now his Heart
Distends with Pride, and hardning in his strength
Glories: ——

The Flash of Light, which appeared upon the drawing of their Swords:

He stays: and to confirm his words, outflew
Millions of flaming Swords, drawn from the Thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden Blaze
Far round illumin'd Hell ——

The sudden Production of the *Pandæmonium*:

Anon out of the Earth a Fabrick huge
Rose like an Exhalation, with the Sound
Of dulcet Symphonies and Voices sweet.

The Artificial Illuminations made in it.

——*From the arched Roof*
Pendent by subtle Magick, many a Row
Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets, fed
With Naphtha and Asphaltus yielded Light
As from a Sky ——

There are also several noble Similes and Allusions in the first Book of *Paradise Lost*, which here I must observe, that when *Milton* alludes either to Things or Persons, he never quits his Simile till it rises to some very great Idea, which is often foreign to the Occasion which gave birth to it. The Resemblance does not, perhaps, last above a Line or two, but the Poet runs on with the Hint, till he has raised out of it some glorious Image or Sentiment, proper to inflame the Mind of the Reader, and to give it that sublime kind of Entertainment, which is suitable to the Nature of an Heroic Poem. Those, who are acquainted with *Homer*'s and *Virgil*'s way of Writing, cannot but be pleased with this kind of Structure in *Milton*'s Similitudes. I am the more particular on this Head, because ignorant Readers who have formed their Taste upon the quaint Similes and little Turns of Wit, which are so much in Vogue among Modern Poets, cannot relish those Beauties which are of a much higher nature, and are therefore apt to censure *Milton*'s Similitudes in which they do not see any surprizing Point or Likeness. Monsieur *Perrault* was a Man of a vitiated Relish, and for that very Reason has endeavoured to turn into Ridicule several of *Homer*'s Similitudes, which he calls *Comparaisons a longue queue*, *Long-tail'd Comparisons*. I shall conclude this Paper on the First Book of *Milton* with the Answer which Monsieur *Boileau* makes to *Perrault* on this Occasion; 'Comparisons, says he, in Odes and Epic Poems 'are not introduced only to illustrate and embellish 'the Discourse, but to amuse and relax the Mind 'of the Reader, by frequently disengaging him from 'too painful an Attention to the Principal Subject, 'and by leading him into other agreeable Images. 'Homer, says he, excelled in this Particular, and his 'Comparisons abound with such Images of Nature 'as are proper to relieve and diversifie his Subject. 'He continually instructs the Reader, and makes 'him take notice, even in Objects which are every 'Day before our Eyes, of such Circumstances as 'should not otherwise have observed. To this he 'adds, as a Maxim universally acknowledged, that 'it is not necessary in Poetry for the Points of a 'Comparison to correspond with one another exactly, but that a general Resemblance is sufficient, 'and that too much nicety in this Particular betrays 'the Rhetorician and Epigrammatist.

In short, if we look into the Conduct of *Homer*, *Virgil* and *Milton*, as the great Fable is the Soul of each Poem, so to give their Works an agreeable Variety, their Episodes are so many short Fables, and their Similes so many short Episodes; to which we may add, if you please, that their Metaphors are but so many short Similes. If the Reader considers the Comparisons in the First Book of *Milton*, the Sun in an Eclipse, of the Sleeping *Leviathan*, of the Bees swarming about their Hive, of the Fairy Dance, in the view wherein I have here placed them, he will easily discover the great Beauties that lie in each of those Passages.

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